

LEADER GUIDE

BELONGING & RELATING TO ONE ANOTHER  
IN THE FAMILY OF FAITH

# Friends & Sisters

LIFEWAY WOMEN

# LEADER GUIDE

**Welcome!** Before you read any further, we want to say how thankful we are for you, the leader. Thank you for your willingness to dive into Scripture, brew the coffee, place the chairs, and set aside the time regularly to meet with other women.

*Friends and Sisters* is a 5-week, discussion-based Bible study from Lifeway Women about friendship, specifically how to find belonging and relate to one another in the family of faith. Our hope is for this leader guide to help you feel equipped to facilitate and guide your Bible study group gatherings in a way that fosters deep conversation and prayer for you and the women you're leading. We hope and pray your Bible study group becomes a place where you can learn in real time how to foster these relationships with one another.

We want to encourage you to guide your group through this study however it works best for you and your group. If you want to follow this leader guide to the letter, do that! If you want to do your own thing, feel free! Our goal is to give you all the tools you might need, but we are certain God has ordained your time with your specific group in your specific setting.

We are grateful for you and praying for you as you lead this study.

*Lifeway Women*

## SUGGESTED SCHEDULES

### 5-Week Study

#### 5–7 Group Meetings • Meeting Length: 1.5 hours

This schedule accounts for five to seven weeks of group meetings, completing one week of *Friends and Sisters* per week.

**OPTIONAL KICK-OFF MEETING**—Distribute Bible study books if participants don't have them yet, get to know one another, and discuss the questions found on page 10 of this leader guide.

**WEEK ONE**—Discuss the Week One personal Bible study using questions found on pages 12-14 of this leader guide.

**WEEK TWO**—Discuss the Week Two personal Bible study using questions found on pages 15-18 of this leader guide.

**WEEK THREE**—Discuss the Week Three personal Bible study using questions found on pages 19-21 of this leader guide.

**WEEK FOUR**—Discuss the Week Four personal Bible study using questions found on pages 22-24 of this leader guide.

**WEEK FIVE**—Discuss the Week Five personal Bible study using questions found on pages 25-27 of this leader guide.

**OPTIONAL WRAP-UP CELEBRATION!**

## 10-Week Study

### 10–12 Group Meetings • Meeting Length: 1.5 hours

This schedule breaks each week of the Friends and Sisters Bible study book into two group meetings. With this schedule, we recommend covering Days 1–3 one week and then Days 4–5 plus an extended time for practical application and prayer the next week.

### Additional Options

Does your number of group meetings fall somewhere in between 8 and 16 weeks? Here are a couple of other options to consider:

- > Add in weeks for review. Complete two or three weeks of the Bible study on a normal schedule and then add in a week for review and catch up. This helps to reinforce the content they've learned or gives the learners extra time to complete some of the personal study they've missed. Think of it as including a mid-term exam or little reviews along the way.
- > Build in weeks for prayer and fellowship. This is much like adding in review weeks except the group spends additional time in prayer and an extra activity to help the group to get to know one another better. You might invite women in advance on these weeks to share a testimony or enlist someone to lead in a time of worship.



## HOW TO STRUCTURE YOUR GROUP TIME

Each group session contains the following elements. We've included a suggested amount of time based on a 1.5-hour group meeting. Adjust as you need to for the time you have together!

**GATHER (30 MINUTES)** This is a time to greet and welcome everyone and get them talking. In the first session, you're provided with some icebreaker and general discussion questions to help group members get to know each other and introduce the study. In the subsequent sessions, you'll find 1-2 icebreaker questions that set the tone for the study.

**DISCUSS (40 MINUTES)** You'll find a suggestion of questions for each week in this Leader Guide. Pick and choose the ones you want to discuss with your group. These questions are designed to help you facilitate conversation around the week's Bible study and personal reflection. As you go through your own study during the week, put a star by any questions or statements you might want to discuss with your group.

**CLOSE (20 MINUTES)** Brief closing activity ideas and/or prayer prompts have been provided. You can use this however you wish to enhance or close the session.

## HERE ARE A FEW TIPS TO HELP YOU LEAD.

**GET THE WORD OUT.** Be sure to advertise the study early and utilize all methods for getting the word out. Post it on your church's website, send emails to potential attendees, and promote it on all forms of social media. It's best to start advertising the study four to six weeks before it begins. The study is five weeks long, which means you will likely meet six or seven times. Visit [lifeway.com/friendsandsisters](http://lifeway.com/friendsandsisters) for free promotional materials to help get the word out about your study.

**SCHEDULE.** Be sure to make everyone aware of the schedule ahead of time and start promptly each week to honor everyone's time. In your group time, you will watch the teaching video together and discuss what you're learning. You'll also be encouraged to spend a good bit of time in prayer.

**STAY IN TOUCH.** Prepare a sign-up sheet with space for names, email addresses, and phone numbers. You may also include information like birthdays, social media handles, and favorite candy so that you can foster community among group members.

**GET COZY.** Make an effort to create a comfortable environment for group meetings. Arrange chairs in a circle to encourage conversation. If your group is large, you may want to split into smaller groups for the discussion or prayer times. If you choose to do so, enlist discussion leaders for each group to keep the conversation moving and focused.

**CHILDCARE.** Be sure to check with participants to see if childcare is needed and organize leaders and space for the children in advance.

**BIBLE STUDY BOOKS.** Each participant will need a Bible study book. Make sure you leave plenty of time for all the books to be ordered and received between announcing and starting your Bible study. Consider

offering a scholarship or buy one-give-one option for those who cannot afford a study book on their own.

**EARLY PREP.** We encourage you to read through the entire leader guide before the first session and evaluate how this will work best for your group. Highlight specific questions from the leader guide you want to make sure you cover during your group time. And be sure you stay on top of your own personal study between each meeting! We've left room in the leader guide for you to write down additional talking points and questions you want to pull in from the personal study.

**PERSONAL STUDY.** Between each meeting, there are five days of personal study to complete in the Bible study book.

**PRAYER.** Most importantly, be sure to pray for the women who attend the study. And pray for yourself as you prepare to lead. Ask God to draw the women closer to Him as they learn more about belonging and relating to one another in the family of God.

**EVALUATE.** At the end of each group session, ask yourself: *What went well? What could be improved? Did you see women's lives transformed? Did your group grow closer to Christ and to one another?* Also, do a final evaluation at the close of the study.

**CONNECT.** Find ways to interact and stay engaged with each member of your group throughout the study. Make use of social media, email, text messages, and handwritten notes to encourage them. Continue these connections even after the study ends.

Next, we've provided a discussion guide for each session. Remember these are simply suggestions for how to use your time together. We want to empower you as you lead to do what is best for your group!

## DISCUSSION GUIDE

### OPTIONAL INTRODUCTORY SESSION

#### **GATHER**

Welcome women to the introductory session of your *Friends and Sisters* Bible study. Provide name tags and distribute Bible study books if participants don't have them yet.

In advance, download the "Friendship Bingo" printable from [lifeway.com/friendsandsisters](http://lifeway.com/friendsandsisters). Print off enough copies for everyone in your group to have one, and use this as part of your gathering time. (Alternate option: have everyone use the bingo card that is on page 43 of the Bible study book.)

#### **MEET AND GREET**

Get to know one another! This will be the main point of today's meeting, so spend as much time getting to know one another as you can. (We highly recommend snacks, coffee, and tea!)

#### **DISCUSS**

Here are a few discussion ideas, especially if you're leading a brand-new group.

Invite each woman to introduce herself and share basic get-to-know-you information.

Ice-breaker: Do you have a favorite friendship from a book or movie, or one you hold up as a standard for a healthy, thriving friendship?


What do you hope to gain from this Bible study and this group?

## PREVIEW THE STUDY

This study has some unique and fun components we want to make sure you know about and include in your group experience. Take a few minutes to preview these together

For starters, each week includes **four days of personal Bible study** followed by one day of “Practice and Pray,” when group members are encouraged to live out what they’re learning about friendship. Encourage women to do as much of the personal study as they can. If they are unable to finish all five days of the personal study, they can still learn and contribute to the group time each week. Brainstorm specific times when they might try to complete their personal study each day.



Throughout the study, you’ll see questions marked with  that will be especially meaningful to talk about together. We’ve included those questions in this discussion guide as well.



Encourage your group members to also tune in to the *Friends and Sisters* podcast, a 6-episode series that accompanies this Bible study. The podcast is hosted by leaders from Lifeway Women and interviews writers from the study. Each episode they’ll discuss the theme of friendship on a more personal level, read and study Scripture, and encourage listeners with practical wisdom for finding true belonging with your sisters in Christ.

Remind your group to complete Week One of the Bible study book before your next group gathering.

## PRAY

Close with prayer. Ask how the group can be praying for one another over the coming week, and then do that now.

## DISCUSSION GUIDE

### WEEK ONE: WE ARE FRIENDS AND SISTERS

#### GATHER

Welcome participants to the study. Allow a time of introductions for any newcomers. (If your group skipped the optional introductory week, begin with the questions and information from the optional first meeting.) Then ask the following question to get your group talking:

What do you wish people knew about you as a friend?

Have some group conversation around the universal challenge of maintaining friendships in adulthood—busy schedules, emotional fatigue, assumptions, missed connections. If your study has a large group of women, this would be a good time for small group discussion.

Why does it feel like making and keeping friends as adults is a completely different challenge than it was when we were younger? What gets in the way for you personally?

#### DISCUSS

Encourage discussion by asking some of the following questions, along with any you flagged in the days of personal study.

What stood out to you from this week of personal study? What has stuck with you? What surprised you or was new information?

Using the diagram activity on page 15, discuss characteristics you associate with friendship and sisterhood.

For women who follow Christ, what expectations and responsibilities does the reality of “sister” imply for Christian friendship?

Ask a group member to **READ JOHN 15:9-17** aloud. In this passage, Jesus links friendship to obedience and love. How should we understand that connection?

How does Jesus’s example redefine the way we approach friendships in general, and more specifically our friendships with our sisters in Christ?



**READ 1 JOHN 4:9.** Why do you think John wanted to highlight this specific point?



In our relationships with God, we can be tempted to try and earn God’s love or work hard to maintain it. Why do you think this is such a tempting trap to fall into?



If we are to “love one another as I [Jesus] have loved you,” then what is Jesus implying? How does Jesus’s example change the way you view friendship?

## REFLECT

Invite group members to share about their time reflecting on the questions on page 41: *As you reflect on the Bible passages you read this week, what stands out to you about the character of God? How have you been challenged and encouraged in your relationship with Jesus through what you've learned? What is one way you want to show your love for a sister in Christ this week?*

Depending on how close the women in your group are, consider ending your discussion time with some more personal conversation related to the Week One “Practice and Pray” (pp. 38-39).

Share some of the thoughts you wrote down in response to this question: *Write a few sentences that put into words your personal belief system around what love is and what love is not.*

What is one action step you have taken or are committed to taking to apply the type of love God describes in 1 Corinthians 13 to a relationship that needs it? How can our group support one another in this effort?

## CLOSE WITH PRAYER

Close your group meeting with a time of prayer. Depending on the size of your group, consider breaking into smaller groups of two or three women and praying for each other.

Remind your group to read and complete the “Week Two” personal Bible study before your next group meeting.

## DISCUSSION GUIDE

### WEEK TWO: SISTERS SEE EACH OTHER

#### GATHER

Welcome group members back to your gathering. Use the following question to get your group conversation going:

Who is a woman in the Bible you wish you could be friends with and why?

If any group members listened to the *Friends and Sisters* podcast Episode #1, discuss it together now.

Why do you think so many people today feel unseen, even when surrounded by others?

#### DISCUSS

Encourage discussion by asking some of the following questions, along with any you flagged in the days of personal study.

What stood out to you from this week of personal study? What has stuck with you? What surprised you or was new information?

Share a story about a time in your life when someone didn't necessarily fix anything, but their presence made all the difference. Why do you think presence—just showing up—is such a powerful part of meaningful relationships?



From Jesus's example with His disciples, we learned about the importance of being present. What are some distractions or excuses that keep you from inviting others into your life or from being present in your relationships?

When you hear the word *hospitality*, you might think of hosting a dinner. But in friendship, it's more like an open posture. What does hospitable friendship look like to you? And how have you experienced that kind of welcome in the body of Christ?

**READ LUKE 10:38-42.** How does this passage show us that Jesus's friendship with Mary and Martha was not just surface level? How can believers cultivate deeper, more meaningful friendships instead of settling for surface-level connections?



Although we read that Martha welcomed Jesus, how might Mary's choice to sit at His feet also be an act of hospitality? In what way does she model the gift of presence?



What do you tend to be filled with that gets in the way of loving others like Christ? (Examples: pride, control, insecurity, comparison, fear, approval-seeking, or self-reliance)



What does Mary's posture—coming to Jesus in devotion, grief, and worship—reveal about the kind of relationship God invites us into in every season of life?

## REFLECT

Invite group members to share about their time reflecting on the questions on page 75: *As you reflect on the Bible passages you read this week, what stands out to you about the character of God? How have you been challenged and encouraged in your relationship with Jesus through what you've learned? What is one way you want to show your love for a sister in Christ this week?*

Depending on how close the women in your group are, consider ending your discussion time with some more personal conversation related to the Week Two “Practice and Pray” (pp. 72-73).

We use the language of “being seen” often in this study. Discuss what it means to allow others to see you for who you are and to be someone who truly sees others, too. In what ways can we, as friends and sisters, cultivate spaces where people feel seen, welcomed, and invited into deeper community?

What are some barriers that keep us from loving others the way Jesus teaches—and how can we overcome them?

What does “doing life” together really look like with our busy lives? How is this different in a big city or small town?

## CLOSE WITH PRAYER

Share prayer requests and lead your group to record them at the top of the first page of each day of study for the coming week. When they open their books each day, this will prompt them to begin that day of study by praying for the needs of others in their group.

Remind your group to read and complete the “Week Three” personal Bible study before your next group meeting.

## DISCUSSION GUIDE

### WEEK THREE: SISTERS CARE FOR EACH OTHER

#### GATHER

Welcome participants back to another week of study. Ask the following question to get your group talking:

Trade a few humorous or surprisingly wise pieces of friendship advice you've received over the years.

If any group members listened to the *Friends and Sisters* podcast Episode #2, discuss it together now.

Separate the women in your group into pairs and encourage them to discuss the Vulnerability Scale on pages 84–85. What did you learn about yourself? Did anything surprise you? What is one takeaway you can apply to the way you approach friendships?

#### DISCUSS

Encourage discussion by asking some of the following questions, along with any you flagged in the days of personal study.

What stood out to you from this week of personal study? What has stuck with you? What surprised you or was new information?

Jesus's example of friendship has come up many times in our study and is the plumb line we measure our own relationships against. What qualities do you most associate with Jesus as a friend?

What makes it difficult for us to follow Jesus's example of friendship—especially things like His honesty, vulnerability, or sacrificial love?



Ask a volunteer to **READ COLOSSIANS 3:12-17**. Which of the character traits from Paul's list have you felt from a friend recently? Note the trait and how you felt to be on the receiving end of that virtue.

Which aspects of Christian friendship do you think the church most needs to recover or emphasize today? How has Jesus personally shaped the way you show up for your friends? How does remembering Jesus's friendship with us help us extend patience, forgiveness, and compassion to others?

When have you experienced women in the body of Christ embodying this kind of Christ-like friendship well?



Discuss the chart you filled in on page 100, related to **COLOSSIANS 4:7-17**. Look again at the descriptions and actions you noted in the chart. Which qualities of the Christian life (from Day Three's study) do you see reflected here?

## REFLECT

Invite group members to share about their time reflecting on the questions on page 107: *As you reflect on the Bible passages you read this week, what stands out to you about the character of God? How have you been challenged and encouraged in your relationship with Jesus through what you've learned? What is one way you want to show your love for a sister in Christ this week?*

Depending on how close the women in your group are, consider ending your discussion time with some more personal conversation related to the Week Three “Practice and Pray” (pp. 104-105).

## CLOSE WITH PRAYER

Read Ephesians 3:14-21 as a closing prayer. Let these words of the Lord encourage you and challenge you as you reflect on how vast and far-reaching is the loving and compassionate heart of our God. Lord, help us to believe these words are true of us and to go and extend this love and compassion to others.

Remind your group to read and complete the “Week Four” personal Bible study before your next group meeting.

## DISCUSSION GUIDE

### WEEK FOUR: SISTERS SEEK PEACE

#### GATHER

Welcome participants back to another week of study. Ask the following question to get your group talking:

Share about a harmless, funny moment when a friendship got unexpectedly tense—like miscommunication over a text, someone forgetting to reply, or two friends having wildly different expectations about plans. Why do you think friendships—even really good ones—inevitably encounter stressors or rough patches?

If any group members listened to the *Friends and Sisters* podcast Episode #3, discuss it together now.






#### DISCUSS

Encourage discussion by asking some of the following questions, along with any you flagged in the days of personal study.

What stood out to you from this week of personal study? What has stuck with you? What surprised you or was new information?

Ask a volunteer to **READ JAMES 4:1-12**. In general, what is the impact of sin on friendship? What kind of sins is James addressing directly in this passage that have an impact on our relationships?

Competition can sneak into friendships, especially among women. Why do you think comparison is such a strong relational disruptor?

-  What are some of the barriers and hardships you face in friendships?
  
-  Reflect on the passages you read in **MATTHEW 26 AND 27** (pp. 117-118). How do Judas's possible motivations and Jesus's response to betrayal inform the way we view our own experiences of betrayal?
  
-  Read **MATTHEW 27:15-26 ALOUD**. Then discuss: What does Jesus's response teach us about how we might respond when we are hurt by a friend?
  
-  Discuss the chart you filled in on page 125. Then have a volunteer **READ 1 CORINTHIANS 1:10-17**. How does Paul's teaching speak to the tensions you noted? What is the better way forward?
  
-  Another passage you read in this week's study was **MATTHEW 18:15-17**. How does this text change our framework for pursuing reconciliation?

## REFLECT

The Bible is clear about how to handle hard relationships and interactions with others. Split up the following passages among readers, and soak them up together: **MATTHEW 5:43-45; LUKE 6:27-28; PROVERBS 24:17; ROMANS 12:14.**

As you reflect on the verses listed above, what action do you sense the Lord might be leading you to take?

Invite group members to share about their time reflecting on the questions on page 137: *As you reflect on the Bible passages you read this week, what stands out to you about the character of God? How have you been challenged and encouraged in your relationship with Jesus through what you've learned? What is one way you want to show your love for a sister in Christ this week?*

### **CLOSE WITH PRAYER**

Close with a “popcorn prayer.” Encourage group members to say a word or phrase of praise to God. Then lead women to use a word or brief phrases to express specific requests to the Lord. As the leader, close the prayer time.

Remind your group to read and complete the “Week Five” personal Bible study before your next group meeting.

## DISCUSSION GUIDE

### WEEK FIVE: SISTERS PURSUE CHRIST TOGETHER

#### GATHER

Welcome participants back to another week of study. Ask the following question to get your group talking:

What's one friendship lesson you learned the hard way? Something that really shaped how you approach relationships now?

If any group members listened to the *Friends and Sisters* podcast Episode #3, discuss it together now.

#### DISCUSS

Encourage discussion by asking some of the following questions, along with any you flagged in the days of personal study.

What stood out to you from this week of personal study? What has stuck with you? What surprised you or was new information?

Have you ever had a moment with a friend or group of believers that felt like a foretaste of eternity? A time when you thought, *This is what eternal fellowship with Jesus and His people might feel like?*

What's one thing you think makes friendship within the body of Christ different from any other kind of friendship? How does that difference point us (and the watching world) to Jesus?

Ask a couple of volunteers to **READ EPHESIANS 4:1-16**. Here we get a glimpse of the ultimate purpose of Christian friendship. How does keeping our eye on the goal and future of our relationships with other believers affect our friendships now?

Let's talk about the difficulty of "speaking the truth in love," and about honesty in friendships. How can we do this well when we disagree and still maintain the unity Paul says is so important and distinctive of Christian community.

How do you see Christian friendships uniquely shaping us into the likeness of Jesus—compared to friendships in general?



**READ JOHN 17:20-23** to your group. What does it look like to be completely one with your brothers and sisters in Christ in today's world?

Thinking in broad terms, what are some ways Christians do a good job of being unified? What are some problems that get in the way? Now apply the same two questions to your church community.



Review Paul's prayer to the Philippian church in **PHILIPPIANS 1:3-11**. How does the thought of being partners and sisters with Paul and Christians throughout the ages encourage you? Challenge you?

## REFLECT

How can the way we treat one another as believers serve as a witness to the watching world?

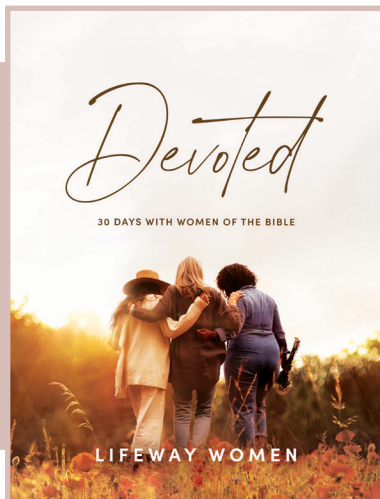
Invite group members to share about their time reflecting on the questions on page 167: *As you reflect on the Bible passages you read this week, what stands out to you about the character of God? How have you been challenged and encouraged in your relationship with Jesus through what you've learned? What is one way you want to show your love for a sister in Christ this week?*

## CLOSE WITH PRAYER

Ask your group to share prayer requests. Then invite a woman who is comfortable praying out loud to open the prayer time. Give time for others to pray as they feel led to close the session.

## FINISHING WELL

**NEXT STEPS** Even after the study concludes, follow up and challenge women to stay involved through another Bible study, church opportunity, or anything that will continue their spiritual growth and friendships. Provide several options of ministry opportunities the members can participate in individually or as a group to apply what they have learned through this study.



### What's Next?

If you enjoyed this study, check out *Devoted*, another study from Lifeway Women.

[lifeway.com/devoted](https://lifeway.com/devoted)